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Factionalism in Lebanon:

Questions from the Senate Appropriations Committee

1. The Lebanese Forces remain a wild card in the Lebanese equation. Can they either be incorporated into the Lebanese Army or neutralized? What is the risk that they will take independent military action?

Incorporating the Lebanese Forces as a distinct unit into the Army probably would be politically disastrous. Incorporation would reinforce Druze and Muslim fears that the Army is an instrument of Christian dominance and would thereby weaken the Army's legitimacy. [REDACTED]

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The Army could accept former militiamen as individuals to help meet its manpower requirements. Incorporating Lebanese Forces officers would be more difficult, however, since the Army's officer corps already is heavily Christian. In addition, it is unlikely that many Lebanese Forces officers would meet Lebanese Army officer standards. [REDACTED]

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Another alternative would be to form the Lebanese Forces into a border guard under the Surete Generale of the Internal Security Forces. Such an arrangement would appease hardliners in the Lebanese Forces by keeping the organization intact, but would ensure that the bulk of the force was away from Beirut. Such a solution might also be acceptable to other religious groups in Lebanon, who fear the Lebanese Forces will become a tool used against internal opposition to ensure Christian dominance.

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The Lebanese Forces also could be retained as a regional "National Guard" stationed in Maronite Christian dominated areas. Other religious groupings such as the Druze and the Shia would be allowed to maintain their militias which would constitute the basis for similar "National Guards" in their regions.

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Leadership problems within the Lebanese Forces and a rift with its benefactor, Israel, has caused a crisis of confidence within the militia reducing the risk that it would move against Gemayel. The government would be threatened, however, by increased Lebanese Forces military actions against the Druze, Palestinians, or other leftist groups. The ability of the Army to control factional violence is crucial to government stability.

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2. Are the Druze and the Muslims, both Shia and Sunni, committed to national reconciliation and the current government?

Muslims and Druze are prepared to cooperate with Amin Gemayel so long as he maintains Lebanon's confessional political system and offers reforms that will increase political participation to the country's non-Christian majority. Any attempts by the Phalange Party to dominate the political system--or perceptions that Gemayel is either unwilling or unable to resist Phalange efforts--will undo the present political consensus. Under these circumstances, non-Christian groups would be encouraged to form alliances, probably involving Syria and the PLO, that could lead Lebanon back into civil war.

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3. Lebanon has a history of sectarian fighting. Are there any factors that suggest such conflict is not likely to reoccur?

Sectarian violence is unlikely ever to be eliminated in Lebanon. Its persistence, however, does not necessarily endanger the government. The location and intensity of such violence determines the threat to the central government. Traditionally, the aim of factional violence has been to adjust the internal political balance--not necessarily destroy it--nor is any domestic group specifically seeking to overthrow the government.

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If the Army and internal security services can keep domestic conflict within "acceptable" levels, the government will continue to function. Even excessive violence, provided it is away from the capital, is unlikely to bring the government down. Instead, the authority of the government probably would be restricted to Beirut, as has been the case in recent years.

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4. What is the evaluation of Amin Gemayel at this point? Rightly or wrongly, the US felt that Bashir Gemayel was in our pocket. Amin is a very different person from his brother. What does that portend for US policy toward Lebanon and for Lebanon's future?

Amin Gemayel appears more determined than his brother Bashir to forge close links between Lebanon and the US. Amin believes that only the US can restore Lebanese sovereignty, deliver on aid, and force foreign troop withdrawals. He has stated

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repeatedly that Lebanon will become the best US ally in the Middle East. He has an exaggerated view of the benefits the US will derive through continued support to Lebanon. []

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Gemayel has proved to be adept at handling domestic issues that fall within the realm of "traditional" Lebanese politics. He is still unsure of himself on larger issues, such as future ties with Israel and relations with Syria and other Arab states. In these areas he has placed himself completely in US hands. He is prepared to do what he can to make the US responsible for Lebanon's fate. Gemayel is likely to be a reliable ally, but his extreme dependence upon the US could also have serious drawbacks in terms of achieving larger US policy objectives in the Middle East. []

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5. Will the Lebanese Muslims be content to honor the historical role of majority, in terms of the presidency and the officer corps, played by the Christians in Lebanon?

Christians have not constituted a majority in Lebanon for nearly 40 years. Muslims, nevertheless, are likely to honor their concession of the presidency to the Maronites. They probably will seek to reduce Christian dominance of the Army or other high level government posts. Muslims undoubtedly would like to control the officer corps, but recognize there are not enough qualified Muslim officers to make this goal feasible. Instead they could press Gemayel to name a Muslim as Defense Minister, a post traditionally held by a Christian. []

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INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR

1. What steps is the government of Lebanon taking to gain control of ports operated by the Phalange in the north?

The Phalange-controlled ports of Dbayeh and Jounieh were turned over to the Government around March 7.

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2. What actions are being undertaken to discourage illegal imports through Haifa into southern Lebanon?

The central government continues to maintain its position that trade with Israel is a violation of Lebanese law but, particularly in the south, can do little to stop the import of Israeli goods. The President of the Sidon Chamber of Commerce, a government organization, began earlier this year to compile a list of Lebanese businessmen trading with Israel, so that they could be prosecuted by the central government when the south returned to Beirut's control. Shortly after Mr. Za'atari's intentions became publicly known, however, he was summoned by Israeli officials and told to desist. The central government reportedly installed customs officials recently at one of its checkpoints south of Beirut, on the road leading up from Israel. It claims that Israeli-origin goods are now being confiscated and dumped into the Mediterranean.

One Arab newspaper claims that mobile Lebanese customs patrols are roving through the south in an attempt to find and confiscate Israeli goods, but we doubt that these actually operate.

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SUBJECT: Questions from the Senate Appropriations
Committee: Factionalism and Infrastructure Repair

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